

Once Again Father

PUBLISHED FOR 'THE BYSTANDER'
BY
HODDER & STOUGHTON



BAIRNSFATHER

A FEW FRAGMENTS
FROM HIS LIFE



From a photo by]

[F. A. Swaine, New Bond Street, W.

CAPTAIN BRUCE BAIRNSFATHER.

[Frontispiece.

BAIRNSFATHER

A Few Fragments from His Life

COLLECTED BY A FRIEND



With some Critical Chapters by
VIVIAN CARTER

Editor of 'The Bystander'

Published for

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THE FIRST FRAGMENT

THE MAN AND HIS VOGUE

‘**I**F only we can get them laughing.’ So remarks to himself the individual who has a difficult ‘crowd’ to manage—a crowd out of humour, critical, peevish, bored and disillusioned. Were the affairs of the Great Nations in the hands of practical men, laughter would be one of the munitions of war, and the recruiting of humorists would be the job of a special department in Whitehall. ‘Instead of which’ the humorist has been, in our country since the war, perhaps, regarded askance until—well, until the subject of this booklet appeared on the horizon, Bruce Bairnsfather, Captain of the Royal Warwicks.

Bairnsfather has been the unsolicited and unexpected laughter-maker-in-ordinary to the forces of the British Empire at war—a volunteer laughter-maker, who combined laughter-making with fighting, and extracted mirth and drollery from the most horrible situations ever endured by human man, situations which have made words of profanity, for the duration of the war, the King’s English.

At first, while the Army received them with unrestrained delight, the public at home received his sketches—which were originally published weekly in the *Bystander*, and afterwards in book-form under the title *Fragments from France*—with amused bewilderment. That they were the ‘real thing’ so far as fidelity goes, was obvious enough, for who but a man who had been out there would have depicted trenches and dug-outs, Johnson holes, battered tin pots, derelict buildings, dead cats, as did this man? Who else would have shown, in the foreground of devastation, an old boot resting on a candlestick on one side of a Johnson’s hole, with a cheap timepiece on the other? Who but a man who had been there would ever even have dreamed, in his wildest nightmare, of the officer’s sword being used as a toasting-fork? Realistic as the sketches were, the stay-at-home public at first found it difficult to believe that there could breathe a ‘chiel,’ living in such an atmosphere of death, who was able to tak’ such notes, and to print them. Yet as the weeks wore on it became obvious that there was such a man, and all doubt as to his actual identity was speedily set at rest by men who had seen him themselves. Besides, the papers published his photograph, in uniform, and at the front. So there must be such a man!

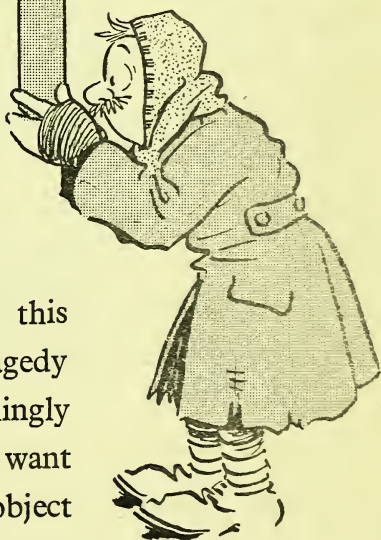
One knows that people at home, safely out of danger, can dig out humour from anything if they work hard enough, and keep



their eyes well away from But who is the man who Bairnsfather was blown up of Ypres—that can laugh at it himself, to laugh? For Bairnsfather has not Britain and the trenches of all the America and the neutral countries. German prisoners' camp in Siberia, 'thanks' of the enemy in terms that ensuing chapter. He has been the tion in the House,' and the recipient from highly placed personages. It that he has been worth several Army by virtue of the stimulus he has imparted to the always latent good-humour of the British soldier. He has carried on, in quaint pictorial form, what Kipling originated, the tradition of Tommy Atkins the man.

Yes, but what kind of man is this who makes war—the most awful tragedy in human experience—seem screamingly funny? That is what you probably want to know, and that is what it is the object

anything sickening. has been through it—at the second Battle and compel others only convulsed Great fronts, but also He has reached a and received the are quoted in an subject of a 'Ques-of remarkable letters has been said of him Corps to the Allies

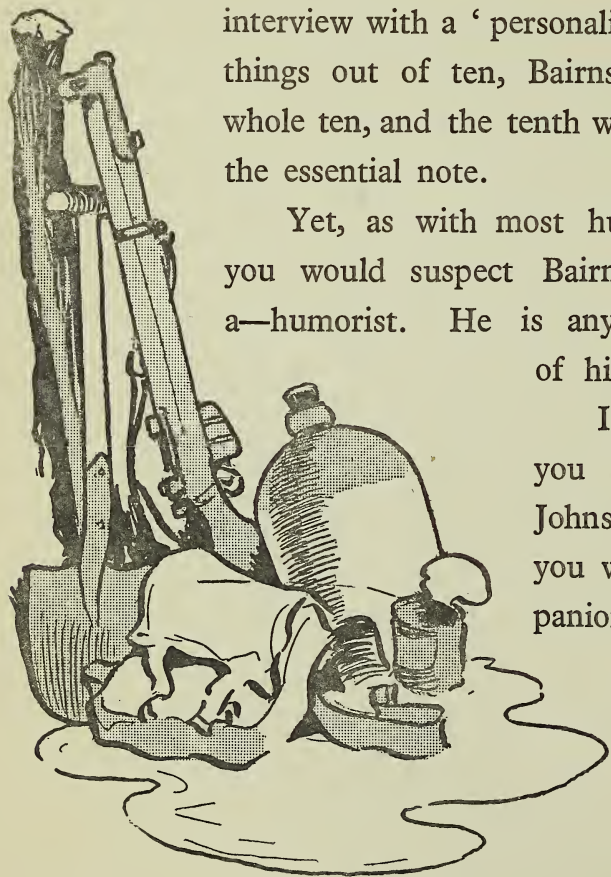


of this little book to tell you. First, as to the man as he is to-day. He is twenty-eight, and doesn't look it. He is slight of build, and his face has a refined intuitive look, with eyes that are clearly enough noting anything there is to be noted about yourself. A more closely observant man does not exist: his sense of detail in character is almost Dickensian. If, at an

interview with a 'personality,' you have noted nine things out of ten, Bairnsfather will have got the whole ten, and the tenth will be the salient feature, the essential note.

Yet, as with most humorists, the last thing you would suspect Bairnsfather to be would be a—humorist. He is anything but a trade-mark of his own wares.

If a sudden 'strafe' threw you together into the same Johnson 'ole, the last person you would suspect your companion to be on the arrival of 'another hopeless dawn' would be the creator of 'Fragments.' Like all true humorists, the source of his



inspiration is deep down in his nature. His inspiration is not from the thing casually seen or heard, but from the thing constantly felt. Very few of his sketches have struck him 'all of a sudden like.' To oblige his editor, thirsting for contributions, he is never at a loss. At a luncheon or dinner table, at the request of a fellow guest, on a menu-card or in one of those awful albums, he rarely fails to deliver the requisite goods. That is because, as will afterwards be mentioned, he has a stage instinct and habit, and much of the actor's desire to please and to keep ever handy the emergency gag or prop. Yet a more naturally unaffected man does not breathe, and if he is not an obvious soldier-type, neither is he an obvious type of anything else. He possesses the magic quality of individuality, though to get to know precisely what it is requires you to have the persistency of a geologist.

To discover a humorist to be present in Bairnsfather, the best way is to conduct a conversation on the subject least humorous in the world; and to get him to give you his impressions of Tommy the best way is to start on the causes, conduct, and probable issue of the Great War.



BAIRNSFATHER'S IDEA
OF HIS POSSIBLE
APPEARANCE AFTER
THE WAR.

He will talk strategy and tactics with the usual frankness of the man who has sampled them on the spot, but sooner or later you will see a little glint in his eye, and you may register the fact that he has thought of a 'Fragment.' Probably he won't tell you what it is, for he dislikes to display anything until it is finished. But in the course of the conversation on the war, we have talked of soldier types, and Bairnsfather will have suddenly remembered something one of them once said to him, or some situation he was once in.

You will also realize that it is for the soldier-man himself, the private, that Bairnsfather has all his affection, and his best pictures are those which display together the two types, Bert, the novice from home, and Bill, who has been out since Mons. Bert is clean-shaved and has a cigarette drooping from his lips and an innocent look of inquiry on his face, while Bill is broad, notable chiefly for his scrubby moustache and that 'fed-up' look in his eyes. Though himself, in his own words, 'disguised as that screaming absurdity a captain,' it is to Bill and Bert that his heart goes out. He and his class have been through the same experiences that are depicted in the *Bystander*, but Bairnsfather regards that as the normal business of the officer. whereas he regards Bill and Bert as persons who are in the war, dug right into it, without any previous thought or intention of their own. These 'jungle-folk,' as he affectionately



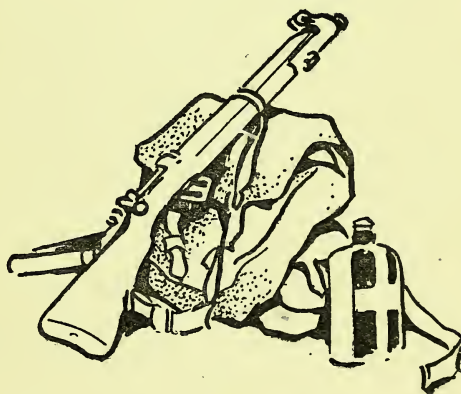
'THOUGHT YOU SAID YOUR UNCLE WAS A-SENDING YOU AN UMBRELLA.'

A CHARACTERISTIC 'FRAGMENT FROM FRANCE.'

[To face p. 14.]

calls the men in the trenches, are as a sort of army of Alices in Wonderland, doing the most marvellous things, and enduring the most amazing experiences, but all the time wondering.

The following 'Fragments' from his life are from material jotted down by various of his friends and associates. No serious biography is attempted—Bruce Bairnsfather is too young to be 'biographed'—but only a sketch of the career and personality, the thoughts and ideas, of one who has made his mark, in his own individual way, while taking part in the greatest war of history. The illustrations have been collected from a variety of sources, and represent, on the whole, the trend of the humorist's fancy before the war brought him fame.





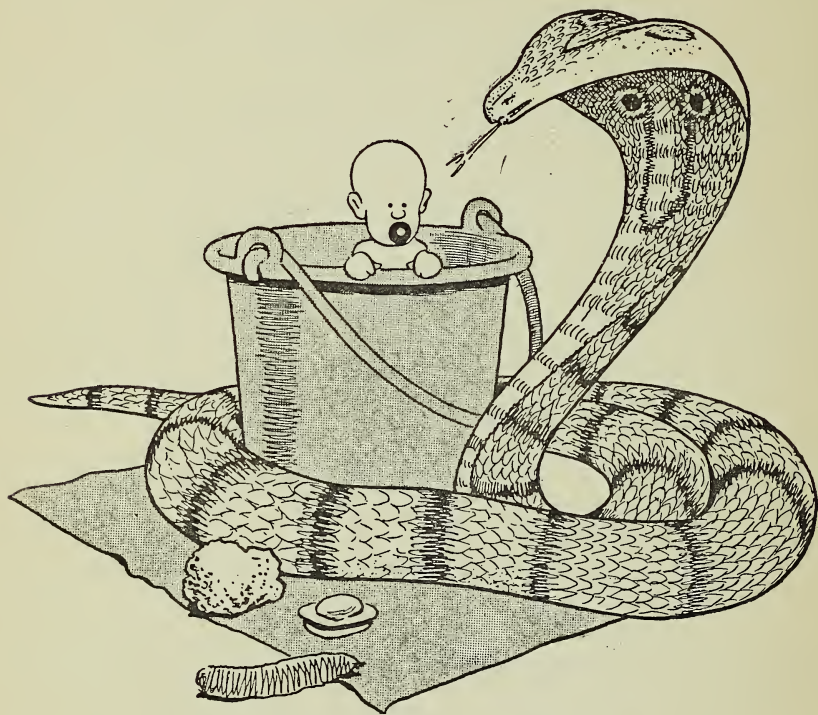
THE SECOND FRAGMENT

EARLY DAYS

CHARLES BRUCE BAIRNSFATHER is the eldest son of Major Thomas Bairnsfather, of the Cheshires, many years a resident at Bishopton, Stratford-on-Avon, and now acting as District Recruiting Officer in the home of Shakespeare. Bruce is towards the end of his twenties, and was schooled at the school of Stalky & Co.—Westward Ho!—having been, like the earlier depicter of the moods of Tommy—the old-type Tommy—Rudyard Kipling, born in India and transplanted home to be educated.

Major Bairnsfather himself combined soldiering with painting and musical composition, and was the producer of several successful musical comedies at Simla, the best known having been the 'Mahatma,' the score of which the writer ran through recently with considerable interest and admiration. Mrs. Bairnsfather having been herself a painter of taste, completed the hereditary influence. So that if Bruce didn't draw, or do something artistic, there was really no excuse for him. Nobody has, however, been more astonished at the precise form his art

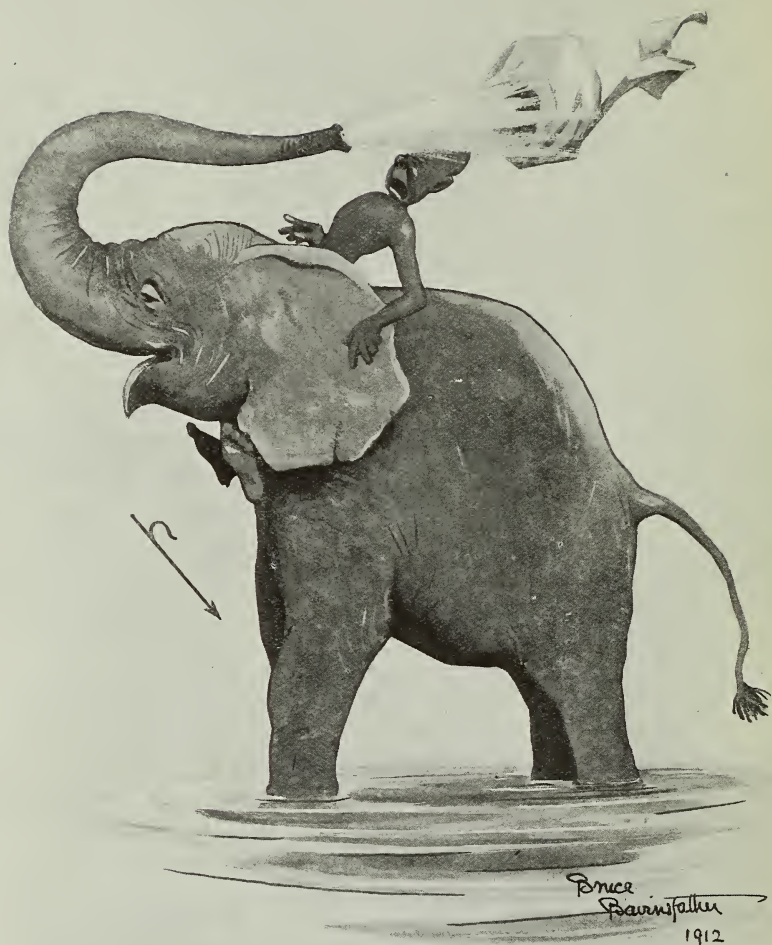
has taken than his devoted parents, and to their credit be it said, none have shown more pleasure and appreciation than they. Any tendencies to 'art' shown in a marked form before



EARLY DAYS IN INDIA.

'I DIDN'T KNOW OF A BETTER 'OLE, SO COULDN'T GO TO IT.

the war were in the direction of the stage, for Bairnsfather is an amateur comedian of some merit, and was one of the prime successes at a famous pantomime given at Compton Verney, by



'THIS OUGHT TO CATCH YOUR EYE.'

Lord and Lady Willoughby de Broke. His love of the stage runs to the variety theatre rather than the legitimate, but in the latter direction he compensates for any deficiencies by a deep love of the Bard of Avon in all his moods, and an intimate knowledge of his resorts :—

Piping Pebworth, dancing Marston,
Haunted Hillborough, hungry Grafton,
Dodging Exhall, Papist Wixford,
Beggarly Broom, and Drunken Bidford.

He did his bit for the ‘Stratford movement’—which is unfairly the subject of a certain amount of local satire—by designing two of the Festival posters. At Stratford itself, he figured in the Aladdin pantomime; also toured the locality with an ‘Ali Baba’ of his own. One of his peace-trophies at Bishopton is his ‘Bishopton Empire’—a toy contrived with every working detail, with cardboard marionette of George Robey, Vesta Tilley, Billy Merson, Harry Lauder, and most of the other famous stars of the pre-war period.

Bairnsfather confesses to an intimate love of the variety show. He has an intuitive sympathy with the human element ‘behind’ and a most surprisingly complete knowledge of the geography of music-halldom, in London and the provinces. So that, had he chosen the stage as profession, his neighbours would have ‘told each other so’ with a vengeance. Had he even come out

as a comedian himself, the locality would have had to bear it with or without grinning.

Bruce Bairnsfather was born at Strawberry Bank Cottage at Murree in the Himalayas. A keen desire for adventure was with him from the beginning of his career. He instinctively selected for his birth a room where the roof leaked in five places. Few have given such early evidence of a predilection for 'roughing it,' all which foreshadowed the Trenches, as any psychologist might detect. Again, in his second year, he burst forth along the line of least resistance and took his mother away from Murree to Chungla Gully. There has never been a greater devotion to a parent than this. It beats Sir James Barrie's. Off he went in a 'dandy,' a sort of native sedan-chair peculiar to his mountain environment. Strange as it may seem, of these incidents in a crowded career he has no vivid recollection; but the cholera having broken out in their midst, he was nothing loath to play the hero as readily as a true strategist, and retired for military reasons. At Chungla Gully Bruce and his mother lived in a one-roomed 'hut,' again a foreshadow of the Great European War, where he was to occupy and vacate hurriedly a villa known as Shrapnel View—with shooting. For three weeks at Chungla Gully, with no furniture save a bed, table, and bucket, abided mother and son. Then further went they into the Gullies, where for six weeks the terrific

FRAGMENTS

struggle for existence went on, and only by robbing the Government mules was life sustained. The name of his dwelling was Batungi Lodge. His life up to then was full of such Indian words.



Though in an Oriental atmosphere and speaking Hindustani better than English, there is no blot on his copy-book, nothing to cause the blush of shame to mount to the most expert cheek. Then back to India again: to Umballa, where his father was Cantonment Magistrate; all which may not be important, but all which helped to shape the exceptional talent which has become a factor in the present European fight. Those were the subtle influences which began his knowledge of life, and made his outlook a wide one. Whence came Colonel Chutney, V.C., who, desiring to keep in touch with dug-out life, sleeps while home on short leave in the cucumber frames, if he did not come from Umballa? And there he also during these seven years, accompanied by his

father, went on shooting expeditions, and made the acquaintance of the elephant at its most energetic stage.

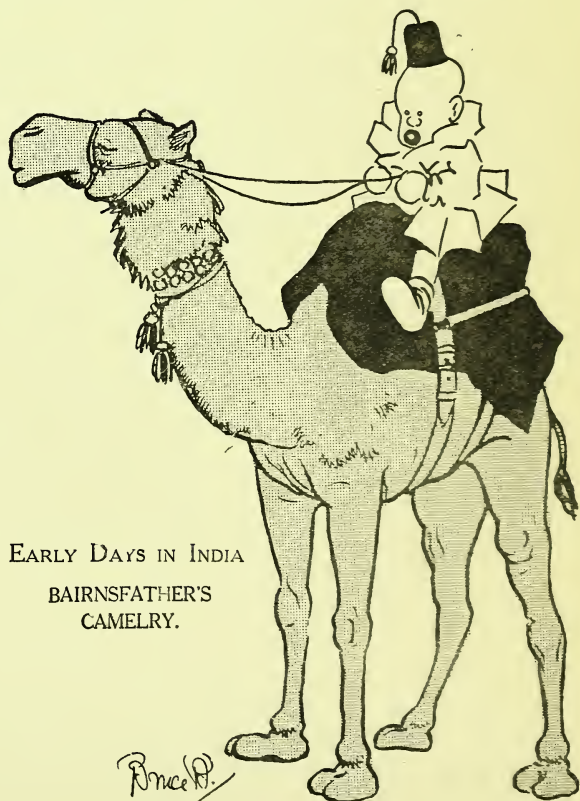
When the parents this time returned to India they left young Bruce behind at a vicarage far from towns. Thornbury Vicarage, near Bromyard in Worcestershire, was a discipline for the boy from which he could not get away. He tells how even to-day he can't read a passage from the Bible without hearing the bells of Thornbury Church tolling him to service. The place got on his nerves; and that which gets on our nerves is discipline, and generally is good for us. Living that submerged life he was disappointed in 'home' at first, but at length learnt there to love the country and to develop a dislike of society. To India he sent sketches of his parochial life, thumbnail snatches of humanity, just as he sent back to England those unpublished impressions of trench-life in France, for the family to inspect, more accurate and living than any letters could be. The interest in all these childish efforts is the marvellous power of observation, and the terse, inexplicable manner in which he dressed his ideas with humour, the way a salad is prepared with vinegar and oils. Blunt also, but anything which is true is like a blow to one who is trained by convention to think untruthfully. But all is seen humorously, never in bitterness, never hurtingly. Yet in those days, as now, he wanted to be merry. What normal boy does not? His



A FRAGMENT.

spirit bubbled up like the air in a cushion : pushed down in one place, it came up in another. The environment could not weight him exactly, and if he dare not draw impressions in *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, he could do so in *Mrs. Beeton's Cookery Book*, as witness that busy and buxom creature sketched on the flyleaf of that literary lady's contribution to *la joie de vivre*, which he found in the vicarage kitchen. He didn't like parties in England, much as he had loved them, especially the fancy-dress ones, at Umballa. But he learnt to love the rural parts, to study its types and its features. In an atmosphere which cultivated self-consciousness, he showed no sign of egoism then, more than he does to-day. Remember, though, it was the cook who got his tribute, not the great lady of the manor. Sympathy and appetite are a strong combination.

And once he sent to India a picture of a milk-maid ! Now we note new



EARLY DAYS IN INDIA
BAIRNSFATHER'S
CAMELRY.

evidences. Family greatly agitated. He was at this time $8\frac{1}{2}$ years old. Precocity! Forerunner of that dreaming soldier in 'Fragments' who had the 'bitter' disappointment of finding both barmaid and beverage had disappeared on waking. And so, soon after, this buoyant spirit—which at Thornbury was like a kite with too heavy a tail—was wafted away to school—to 'Westward Ho! College.' See Kipling's 'Stalky & Co.,' which Bairnsfather declares got absolutely the spirit of the school. Here we find the usual things happening, an interest in everything which interests schoolmasters not at all; a gift for caricature which was, strange to say, greatly appreciated both by his associates and instructors, proof of real good humour; at games, rotten; at mechanical devices, expert; at entertaining in his own way, by drawing, constantly drawing, he was popular. He loved his school-days, but for all his sense of fun and the melancholy of exile at Thornbury, he loved the country best, and longed for its milkmaids, its cooks; in short its 'types.' From Westward Ho! he went to Trinity College, Stratford-on-Avon. His family came from India and settled in the country near the same old town; so, gradually Bruce was getting more and more at home in England, and coming more and more into his own.

Yours sincerely R.R.



STUDENT DAYS.



AS HE SAW HIMSELF IN THE UNIFORM
OF THE WARWICKS.

SPECIMENS OF BAIRNSFATHER'S EARLY WORK.



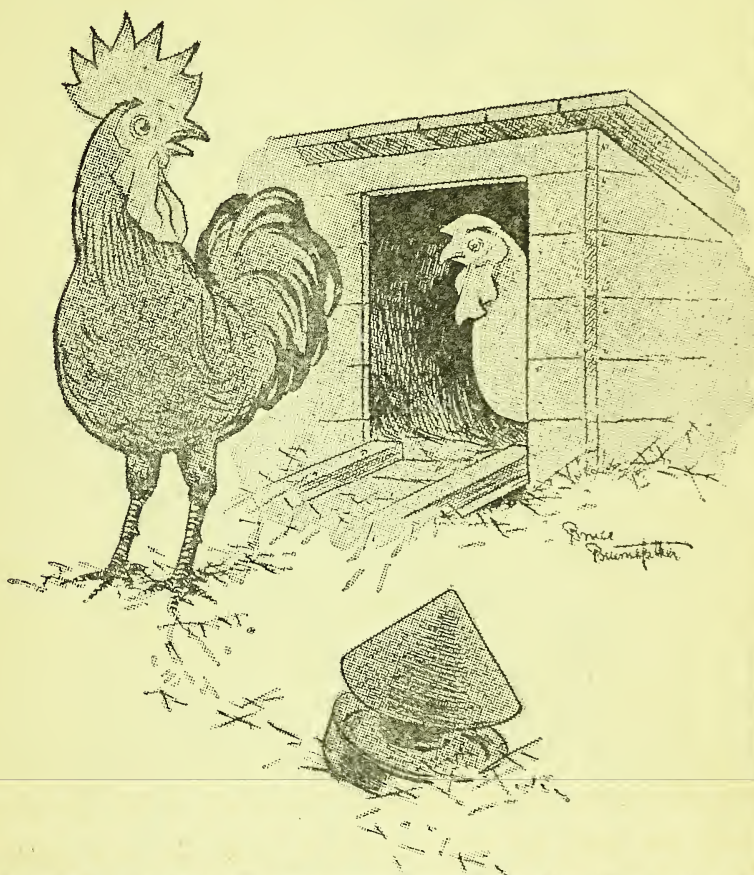
THE THIRD FRAGMENT

DAYS OF ADVENTURE

AFTER leaving Trinity College, Bairnsfather became the victim of the family inheritances, that is on the martial side, and that was, in his case, on both sides, for he sprang from stock who for long time had considered the sword far mightier than the pen ; so there seemed nothing for him to do but still maintain the family prejudices. He therefore passed the Army qualifying examinations, and after undergoing a certain amount of training with the Warwickshire Special Reserve, he was attached to his father's old regiment, the Cheshires, and went to Lichfield, where his life mainly consisted of bayonet practice with a sergeant. After a little time spent at lunging about trying to puncture the alert N.C.O., the whole circus migrated to Aldershot and more time passed with drilling all over that area, till at length fed-upedness hit him so hard that he decided to take up engineering. It was a practical thing, and while not greatly appealing to him, it held out the inducement of opportunities

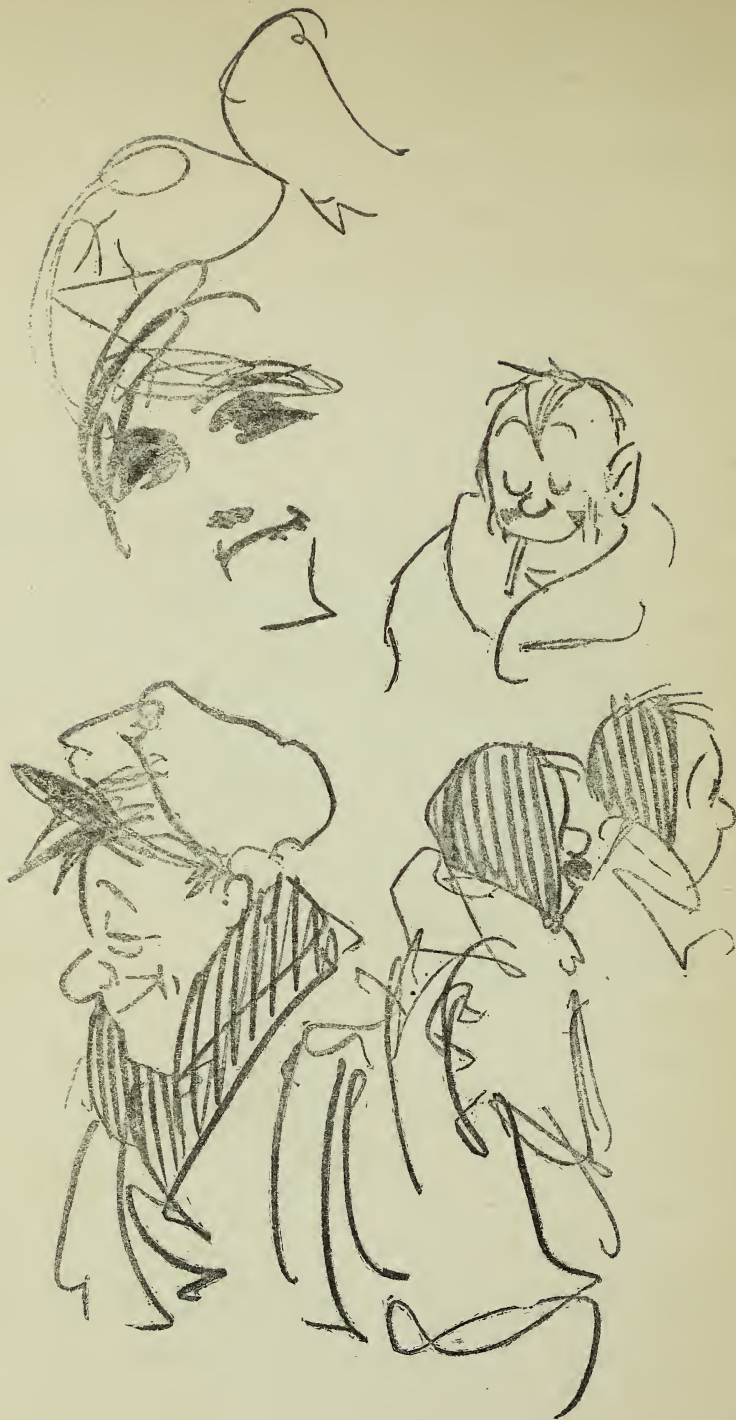
for drawing, which the Army in peace time did not offer.

It was while wandering up and down the country in the employ of an engineering firm, that he prosecuted his quest of 'the type' in music hall and byway from Wigan to Cardiff, just as later he sought it along the Johnson-pitted roads of France. Back to Warwickshire for an interval of sketching and drawing, then he would hit the highway again, always studying, always engrossed in those who had succeeded with brush or pencil, getting into the depths of his subject as deeply as he was able, and cultivating that spontaneous technique which was to give his work its directness and vitality, all which things in this case the conventions of the Peace Army would have stifled. Engineering was a stepping-stone for him: his energy and sympathy did the rest. None of the art work he did during this long period of application to his pencil and his type was what might be called for concert purposes. Yet they were of the same nature and led to the same end as the ceaseless piano practice which makes the virtuoso. By sketching on theatre programmes, producing amateur pantomimes, in sauntering through slums, in dining at great houses, in analysing absorbingly the works of Forain, Georges Scott, Fabiano, Barribal, Tom Browne, Herouard and the rest, he kept in touch with his own talent so completely as to give us that unique thing—a humorist of the first order amid the tragedy of war.



THE TAUNT.

'AND WHO WAS IT SAT ON A GOLF BALL FOR THREE WEEKS?'



FRAGMENTS FROM CAPTAIN BAIRNSFATHER'S SKETCH BOOK.

And so, once upon a time, in that spirit of adventure and with the now well-known humorous method of attack, Bairnsfather took a voyage across the Atlantic. During his engineering period an occasion arose for some work to be done in Newfoundland. No one else in the firm seemed keen to go, but the project appealed strongly to him. He immediately had visions of docks, forests, fishermen — in short, adven-



THE BIRTH OF 'FRAGMENTS.'

ture, and was all on for it. So, armed with tools and instruments, he proceeded to Liverpool, determined to see the New World, or at least re-discover it. All problems for him have ever been solved by laughter—so he faced with grinning determination the ugly business of sea-sickness, that bane of the temperamental, for there is no surer sign of artistic gifts and great imagination than a proneness to be abnormal on the ocean wave. To Bairnsfather trench life is a Bacchic festival compared with one hour at sea. So it was scarcely with a light heart or a steady head that he set out on an Allan liner for Newfoundland. Prospects were grim, to say the least, and had he known how the voyage was to be protracted by the presence of icebergs and rough weather, which brought to his lively fancy vivid ever-moving films of the then recent *Titanic* calamity, he might have thought a third time before setting sail from Liverpool. But there is no turning back in a sea-trip, any more than from the tracks of Time, so he lazed and qualmed and retched till he reached St. John's, on one of those slimy, slippery, foggy mornings, when there isn't any good in any of us. Here he searched around for petrol, and soon started on his two days' jaunt by road to Spruce Brook, near Port Baques. Under normal circumstances Spruce Brook would have meant a world of wild and woolly adventure to his mind, but under the ever-present conditions of slush he was dampened to the marrow, as one



MORE FRAGMENTS FROM BAIRNSFATHER'S SKETCH BOOK.

who leaves hope outside with his umbrella when he entereth in.

Very little of the alluringly artistic happened at Spruce Brook. While there he explored the fastness and did his job, for he went out to fit up a lighting plant of some sort at an hotel known as *The Log Cabin*, which was not an hotel in the ordinary sense of the word, but a lodge in a vast wilderness designed to accommodate those who might care to hunt big game: but all the big game he found there was solitude, and that proved a case of the fox hunting the hound, for it pursued him with home-sickness. He longed for his studio in Warwickshire, his nights at Wigan, and the lights of the Empire and his types. The one outstanding drawing perpetrated at *The Log Cabin* was a luggage label for that hostelry, showing it to be far from the crowd, with nothing for society but a murmuring pine and a moose. The label is effective, a log cabin house, some pine trees and a deer's head, and all apparently ten thousand miles from a piece of elastic. It must, though, have served as a good advertising decoy for any one who wanted to cultivate that sort of solitude. But to a man who liked towns there could only be one word, the American one: 'Gee!' Bairnsfather did like it—for a time—but he did not find it a wrench to break away from its fatal fascinations; and his business there accomplished, he was back in St. John's.

Precarious is the shipping service in that dangerous part of the coast, and he was obliged to wait for his boat, and spent his time studying the old Newfoundland town, always sketching, busily sketching. He got to know the fisher-folk and listened to their yarns. Everybody seemed engaged in fishing there. There was nothing else to do but to fish, catching or not catching, as the case may be. Cod was the one theme of the community; and here coddling—that trick of poking fun and joking at which Bairnsfather was always so adept—took on a more serious aspect in the form of fish—and fish and ever more fish. It was the topic and tonic of the natives. The very mattresses seemed stuffed with cod. Cod was the parson's text and the doctor's remedy. At meals his was all cod: fried cod, boiled cod, cod cakes, cod chowder, and just cod. He did not get so filled up with his fisher friends and the hale and hearty folk of St. John's and their manners and customs and lore, as with their cod; and so, weary of waiting for his boat, which was probably tangled up somewhere in icebergs and fogs, and not finding great scope for open-mindedness, grace and cheerfulness, he arranged to get home or bust, on a species of tramp ship, which carried besides only a cargo of wood, pulp and lobsters, and as he felt like all three of these commodities, he risked the ordeal, and said farewell to St. John's. It was a boat that had made many crossings. Having been informed of

Bairnsfather's fondness for the sea, we can appreciate the more his untoward sympathy with the bad sailor in the *Bystander* cartoon, where his pure and brotherly feeling for the discomforted victims of the wave is so touchingly depicted; and we can easily imagine his cold shivers when he found that his berth on this shifting tramp was just over the propeller. It was like sleeping in Big Ben for ten days. To him it was not so much like beginning existence over again as living the hereafter in advance. When able, he constituted himself the life of the ship—a drawing-room entertainer afloat—and became the pet of the crew, by making sketches of them from various angles of their daily routine, and distributing his drawings like tracts. And while he sat on bales of pulp *à la* Jacobs, watching the cook peel potatoes, he thought how the County at home around its comfortable 'seven coursers' envied him his 'yachting experience'!

At last the coast of Ireland hove into view. We shall not dwell longer on the incidents of the sea. The hesitating ship: the near horizon: the far-off glimpse of home: the light in the window. Limp by limp the vessel waged its



EARLY SKETCH OF 'BILL'
A familiar feature of many of the
'Fragments.'

heavy bulk against the offending tide, till at length the Irish Sea clasped a million lobsters in its salty arms. Steady the old rusty tramp took its way for Liverpool, and Bairnsfather, like a shipwrecked hero, waited on deck, in pyjamas, for home and beauty.

No man kisses his native soil with the same gratitude and patriotism as the man who can't help being sea-sick. Sea-sickness might even be found, in some deeply thinking Teutonic mind, to be the origin of patriotism—the beginning of nationality—the love of Fatherland and Mother Earth. It is easily understandable! And no man ever felt this emotion more fundamentally than Bairnsfather. All which, as any one can see, makes England to him a land specially worth fighting for, and accounts perhaps for his patriotic presence in the Trenches, where he recognized that there is another elementary illness quite as harrowing as sea-sickness, namely, land-sickness. Do these fighting men ever need a doctor? 'No,' he said to himself; 'laughter is the physic of hard lines.' So he gave them laughter. Nothing can purify like laughter, and above all laughter at one's self; for to see himself humorously is the greatest purifier a man can have. To be held up to ridicule does not cleanse. Wit, as society plays practise it, is of no physical or social value; but humour, a good-natured sympathetic joking with a man, lifts him out of the dumps—and the Slough of Despond. Just as he cheered the crew on the

Battered Nancy labouring under the burden of pulp and lobster, so has Bairnsfather given stimulus to the men in France, making them forget their home-longing by showing them themselves at home in the Trenches: by helping their spirits to shape so that their bodies may continue equal to their burdens. At the same time he has visualized the war for us in England. The only way he can be repaid is for some cartoonist to find a similar jocular cure for sea-sickness.

The strangeness of life, the vigour of hope, the immortality of good spirits among men, the vagary of careers, the good in all of us—these are the Bairnsfather themes. He has raised pluck to a virtue, and a golden text. The soldier speaks for him and tells you this fact wherever you meet him and talk to him of Bairnsfather.

And yet while not in any sense have his days been exciting ones, there is a kind of thrill in them—the thrill of uncertainty existing in all who live by their gifts, which is another way of living by what is known as one's wits, in the lives of all who give strength to others by means of their sympathy and imagination.

Imagine our soldier



philosopher in Plug Street, somewhere in France, just a little while ago part of a cargo of lobsters on the Atlantic, and next year, perhaps, reading the lessons in St. Paul's. One never knows, and that is what makes life fascinating to Bairnsfather, and meanwhile he says : ' Let's be merry.' And we are.

' I am afraid the great legitimate actors, whom I admire so much, could not have taught me the frontal attack of Life so well as those fearless comedians of the Halls,' he said briefly, when I asked him if any of his music-hall investigations had stood him in stead as a soldier. The way they butt up against an audience takes courage of no ordinary sort. You may shake off a bulldog if you shake long enough, but you can't get free from the determined and experienced comedian whose living is dependent upon making you relax your face, because it's the comedian who is doing the shaking. ' Your laughter or your life ' is the threat which makes his success. Fighting requires much the same method. Amid these comics, low and high, Bairnsfather found his lessons, so far as the war was concerned ; so he turned them to good purpose in the cause of Old England.

oft in the shilly night



"ALT 'OO GOES THERE?"



THE FOURTH FRAGMENT

BAIRNSFATHER AS A FRAGMENT IN FRANCE

THE outbreak of the great war found Bruce Bairnsfather, with hundreds and thousands of his class and temperament immediately at the post of duty. Naturally, it was to his old regiment that he reverted. After a short time at a mobilization station, Bairnsfather left Southampton for the port of Havre almost before he knew what had happened, on a ship crowded with troops. Those were great days. Nothing thrills in the same way as uncertainty and determination backed up by a wrong to right. He tells now of two glad nights in Havre, which many thought would be their last plunge into the delights of this world, judging from the news which filtered through. While in England, to those favoured few who went first into the slush, broil and conflict of the thing, the spirit of knight-errantry, and a sober sense of duty had impressed them

with almost religious intention. At Havre they heard the note of honest adventure being sounded with contrasting fanfare and all the accustomed atmosphere of a military nation. Pell-mell was in the air, making a harmony of discordant elements. It, too, was a spirit derived from things we imagined in our poor knowledge of manners and men were long dead. Havre presented a scene which the elder Dumas would have loved and which only he could describe, with its sweeping colour, its mystery, its subtle interplay of human passion, patriotism, excitement, indignation and awe. It was a soldiers' town, peopled by soldier souls. Cafés were like bee-hives; the streets swarmed with women of all sorts, all keen, tumultuously keen—*à bas les Boches!* Only patriotic airs sounded from the orchestras in the cafés, only patriotic songs were to be heard being sung above the din and confusion of the street traffic. The men in regimental equipment walked with the tread of soldiers. It was FRANCE, the old France, the fascinating, always alluring France, and the spirit of *Les Trois Mousquetaires* dominated the French world. Chivalry was also awake there in a more martial if not a less religious form than in England. And there they were, those among the first British who went forth, having two glad nights in Havre, thoroughly conscious of the fact that these two glad nights might be their last on this good, kind earth. Bairnsfather, en route to 'Somewhere,' noted these things and saw the irony, tragedy, and heroic fun of the situation of

which he was part and parcel. This was the love of adventure which all his life he had longed to satisfy ; which he had loved to read about in old books. From Havre to Rouen ! in Summer a tender scene, with timid and caressing green, for no green grows old like the green of apple tree leaves in Normandy, singing themselves to silver ; in Autumn a scene red as blood and yellow as gold and as gentle as moss in those famed forests ; in War, a scene brave with hurrying men from hamlet and farm, with churches busy with prayer and only silent where grass grows over graves.

At Rouen Bairnsfather secured a passport, which provided for his being dumped at a siding in Flanders ; and from there he went straight into the Trenches. The Trenches ! And this was the Garden of Europe ! It is hard to imagine what he felt when he 'took to the mud.' For dreariness and darkness and slush and water, this particular Trench was the cesspool of the world : a world steeped in dereliction, dank and despair. There was the close unfriendly contact with Death. There was the penetrating greyness, the ugly aroma of stagnation and depression. And this was the horror which men out there actually got used to, and in which Bairnsfather saw so much to make them laugh.

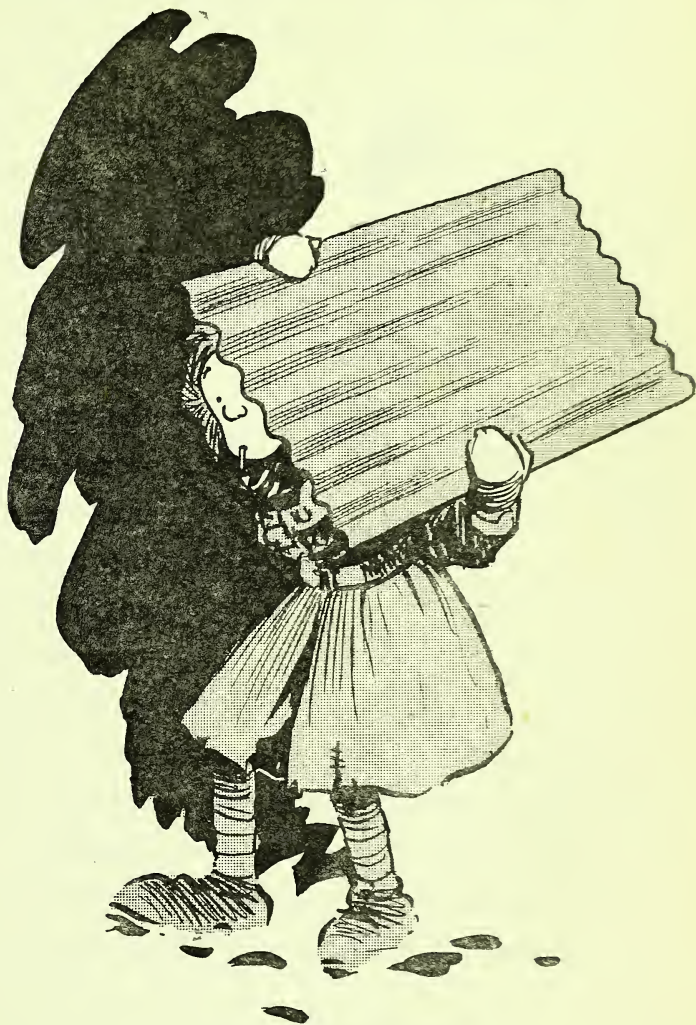
He was billeted ^{on} a farm, a type with which his drawings have made us familiar. He was too much occupied with the

business of war to think anything about drawing, although that impulse had always been a chief one in his life from his earliest youth. Besides the monotonous or exciting routine, as the case



may be, of the day, there was little in the rotten turnip field in which he was planted to rouse an inspiration. Some three months passed before he could draw any pictures, and then he only sketched incidents on scraps of paper and sent them along the Trench to amuse and cheer the men, or sent them in lieu of letters to friends at home. He drew cartoons of a sort on the walls of the farmhouse, and these pleased his companions mightily. All this dismalness was before any pronounced organization had taken place, and the horrid primitiveness of the conditions of life then revolted far more than they attracted him. It was a grey world : there was grumbling at everything—except the glorious fact that they were out to ‘do’ the enemy. The guns never ceased their convincing argument night or day. There was no hate, no bitterness among the men.

They were all fine fellows at bottom. At length even their grumbling became picturesque to Bairnsfather: later it became humorous, and in the end excruciatingly funny, because he saw what kept them at it steady and certain: their courageous determination and gallantry. To him finally they were War Jesters. They sewed clumsily, but wittily, they ragged wittily, they snored wittily, they cooked wittily; if they hated the enemy at all, they hated him wittily. 'Hate,' he declares, 'varies inversely with the square of the distance from the Front.' And these men, who at first appeared to him in this age of civilization as a kind of aggravated savage



BERT IN DIFFICULTIES.

conducting a troglodyte war with less than the dignity of moles, all brought back to Nature with a thud, suddenly struck him as getting the very best out of such a life as they were obliged to live there. They were getting, in spite of circumstances, in spite of death and appalling sadness, fun



'IN MUFTI':

A bit of Bairnsfather that suggests
Phil May.

out of 'the whole blooming business.' And while he felt sorry for the real fellow—the bloke who has to stick it out—he got much satisfaction from the fact that there was many a hearty laugh left in those tried and courageous breasts. That the enemy had wilfully flung the world back into primitive conditions tended to embitter some of the men, but not for long, not at any rate while there was anything to make them laugh. So months and months of mud and bully beef were

grumbled through good-naturedly: and then they were moved from trench to trench, all revolting to any one with an imagination at all. And during this migrating period, when hardships often became more than could be humanly borne, Bairnsfather noted the fearful struggle with self which each of these men was fighting.

A ZULU'S NIGHTMARE

FOR THE BANJO



A FRIEND OF THE ARTIST HAVING COMPOSED A BANJO MARCH, PLAYED IT TO BAIRNSFATHER, WHO DESCRIBED IT AS A ZULU'S NIGHTMARE, AND WHEN CHALLENGED TO PRODUCE A COVER FOR THE MARCH, PROMPTLY REPLIED WITH THIS SKETCH. IT WAS ADOPTED—WITH WHAT RESULT TO THE SALES IS NOT RECORDED.

[To face page 53.]

All were enduring the same, and this common battle within each had produced a comradeship among them which was almost beautiful and invariably expressed itself in jest, in laughter; and when things seemed to have touched rock bottom, misery some way found out its fellows and so came the pearl from the diseased oyster, the priceless pearl of fun.

Bairnsfather describes those long days in the Trenches as more harrowing and devitalizing than any great offensive could possibly be. To any one with a particle of imagination they were the limitless limit, like an endless succession of funerals where you are both corpse and mourner. There's—so—much—time—to—think! There you are, day in, day out, gnawed by suspense and monotony, hanging in mid-air, as it were, between sky and earth, with Heaven as a possibility and War as a certainty. The curious restlessness it all produced, like wanting to scratch and having no place to scratch. In your resignation you find humour.

It is said that at his last moment a drowning man lives his whole life over in a flash like a vivid film before the mind. In the Trenches one lives one's life over every minute in the day and night. Truly they also serve who only stand and wait. The absolute soldier—the absolute callousness—the absolute hopelessness—why not laugh? It is not



only a philosophical kismet, it is the British birthright. And those who have had the nastiest experiences laugh the most at the Bairnsfather cartoons. That a hopeless predicament can be pathetically funny he has proved to us—as no other man of his time or any time has yet done. Such is the psychology of humour in the Trenches, and, in fact, the whole psychology of the British soldier. It was the war which revealed these men to themselves. Why, to stare at a dead cow from a dangerous ‘parapet’ for consecutive months *must* become funny. The cow, with legs sticking up like a four-poster, had so little concern for the diplomatic affairs in the Balkans, and yet, what a real thing War had been to that cow!

So Bairnsfather, after months of slime and grime, came to the conclusions which resulted in his drawing his first picture, and the manner and consequences of its reception in London are subjects of a following chapter.

The War, as well as the conditions of life it created, were getting worse and worse, for the battalion was moved into the Ypres salient, and here in the second battle of Ypres our Captain came very near cracking the joke of his life. It’s not a long story, and runs in this wise. They had entered the struggle about four in the morning. An awful din filled the air, deafening and choking. The atmosphere was venomous with bullets; bodies of the dead everywhere; Ypres a mass of



THE GENESIS OF A 'FRAGMENT.'

yellow flame ; the world clutched by the throat was staggering and finding it hard to breathe. So was it when the dawn broke with stern greyness, bringing no light to that smoke-driven country. Bairnsfather was doing no more than every man was doing at that moment, and they were all doing everything in their power to do their duty. He was in charge of machine guns as usual. Two in one place, two in another position on a hill. He must run frequently between these. With dawn the attack began—down in an expanse of field facing the Germans, one of those Hell rehearsals which no pen can describe. He was hurrying along the moat of a farm when a Canadian officer dashed by him, obviously carrying a message. Bullets were falling like green fruit from an apple tree in a tornado. About fifty yards on Bairnsfather saw the Canadian collapse in a heap. He didn't move. The battle had come to a standstill for a moment, although the machine guns were busy ; the world, exhausted and sore, seemed taking a deep breath. On the farm behind, the bullets were falling through the roof about two a minute. There was a strange, unearthly calm over everything, mocked only by the machine



guns. Bairnsfather ran out to where he had seen the officer fall. It was not an action of any risk. It was what any one would have done in like circumstances. It was what everybody was doing on all sides. It was the higher development of that *camaraderie* which produces humour and at length reduces the Army and at the same time lifts it to the simple term Man. He tried to drag the Canadian to a safer ditch, but finding such a tug beyond him, he cut off the equipment and cut the clothes to make sure just what had happened. A bullet had entered under the fellow's right arm and had come out on the left side of his chest. There was the gurgling noise—worse to hear than all the perdition of a great offensive; there was the pale greenish colour in the face. A gunner was hailed and told to throw a water-bottle over. The gunner, Mills by name, 'an excellent chap,' came himself. The wounded soldier was propped up and left in Mills' care while Bairnsfather ran back to the farm for a stretcher. There he found the house crowded with wounded. He spoke with a Canadian colonel, to whom he gave the papers taken from the officer. Could he have a stretcher? Certainly! A young lieutenant was ordered to accompany him back. They returned along the edge of the moat to avoid machine gun fire. The wounded man on the stretcher was at length got to the farmhouse, where all was an agony of confusion. It was all so easy to do, this kind of thing, when everybody else was doing

it. The sensations of war were to him at once so terrible and so simple, so sad, so ironical. Then Bairnsfather got back to his job, dead beat. It was by this 5.30 a.m. He started along the front of the farm by the side of a ditch which went out on to the Fortuin Road, and when he had gone about forty yards one of the shells aimed at the farm exploded right alongside him. He was knocked down and lay for some time absolutely done in, but managed to drag himself by a double row of dead men, relics of previous fighting, got some water, and was helped by an orderly to a dressing station at St. Jean. And so that grey dawn had turned to a grey noon; and such is the day's work *every man* does at the Front; where, before and after such bickerings, every man who can laugh becomes more and more the captain of his own soul. Such is the psychology of the Trenches; for Laughter is the invigorating handmaid of Pluck.





MORE FRAGMENTS FROM
BAIRNSFATHER'S SKETCH BOOK.

Shy

BB
Belgium
1915

[To face p. 60



THE FIFTH FRAGMENT

DAYS OF DISCOVERY

FOR a man engaged in the Great Adventure of War, in prospect of winning undying fame on the battlefield, the mere honours of publicity in so minor a thing as Art may seem to the romantic-minded civilian to be of a paltry kind. To the unromantic-minded soldier, it is otherwise. The honours of the battlefield may come, or probably may not come, in the day's march, and may be enjoyed either in this world or the next, or on the border line between both. It has been said by cynics that the soldier in modern war cares little or nothing about the honours in question, and that if he has any feeling for them it is rather one of distrust. This is not altogether true. Still, it does often happen that the hero of the picture papers is not at all the hero of the trenches, and the deed not the one which Tommy himself would have selected for honour. Tommy is too much Tommy to regard war in any romantic light at all, and the thoughts of Tommy in the trenches or thereabouts

are thoughts mostly of home. If Tommy is ambitious, it is likely to be in directions *après la guerre*. Therefore, should anything written or sketched by Tommy find its way into print at home, may it be said the day of its appearance is a greater day in his life than the day on which he may have achieved some unrecorded glory at the Front? Viewed in this light, the storming of the ramparts of London picture-journalism by Bairnsfather of the Warwicks is an achievement of which the Army at the Front is at least as proud as it would have been of his storming of, say, Dead-pig Farm in the battle of Vin Ordinaire, and the story of how it came to be may rank high in any future record of 'Great Deeds of the Great War.' It is, at all events, one of the most remarkable feats in the whole history of journalism for a completely unknown man to have won for his own talent so instantaneous a recognition, and such universal approbation.

It has already been said that Bairnsfather had a sketching habit, for which throughout his school and professional days he was known to his friends. Also, those friends doubtless foresaw that perhaps one day he might find his way into print as some sort of a comic humorist. They did not foresee that a Great War would have to happen first, and that his arrival in print would be the result of a bomb explosion.

One of the most painfully familiar of all situations at the



THE LAST STRAW.

'Let's see ; it would be this time last week I was dining at Pagani's with dear old ——'

VOICE FROM THE SHADOWS : 'There's only bully to-night, sir. They aren't giving us bread this time, but there's plenty of biscuits if the water 'asn't got to 'em.'

[To face p. 65]

Front is that in which a quiet and dismal little party in a dug-out are shaken out of their seven senses by something hurtling over their heads and the flying of fragments, when there rushes to every lip the words '*Where did that one go to?*' In no sense in itself a humorous situation : on the contrary, a tragic one. During one of the intervals between repetitions of this particular experience, Bruce Bairnsfather sketched it upon paper, and handed it round. It was voted a truthful record of an actuality, and it was suggested that Bairnsfather should 'send it up somewhere.'

To 'send something up somewhere' was not altogether a thing unthought of at any time by Bruce Bairnsfather. On the contrary, it had occurred to him often that he might do this selfsame thing. In the case of this particular sketch, however, the soldier-artist had thoughts at the back of his mind. Certainly he would 'send it up somewhere,' but precisely where? To a comic paper? Well, perhaps : it might amuse the readers of one week's issue, be passed on, and forgotten. No, reasoned Bairnsfather, this sketch shall go to London, but it shall do more than merely amuse a minute fraction of London in its tram or 'bus, or tea-shop. It shall make a considerable portion of London *think* : realize something, even in jest, of what really is at this place they vaguely talk of as 'The Front,' and of what are the true feelings of the real human Tommy who has gone there.

Bombs, guns, maxims all firing
all day and sham attacks going on
makes me feel like being at home.

(by home I mean that damp little ^{again} cavity
north of Plugstreet wood wherein I
spent so many happy days)

Most of this Circus consists of Scottish
regiments and every one has got a band
and they all play at once. Quite the
"Mop" leffed. One frequently meets things
of this class round the corner



So we ought to win the war alright-

J. V. S.
P. M. B.

Wednesday
11.30 P.M.

S- V-
For the last
time



I have finished here at last -
The job is over, as the Dursian
push off to France tomorrow
I shall go till later, so for the
next few days I hope to escape back
to the home of my forefathers

LETTERS TO A FRIEND WRITTEN FROM A CAMP IN ENGLAND.

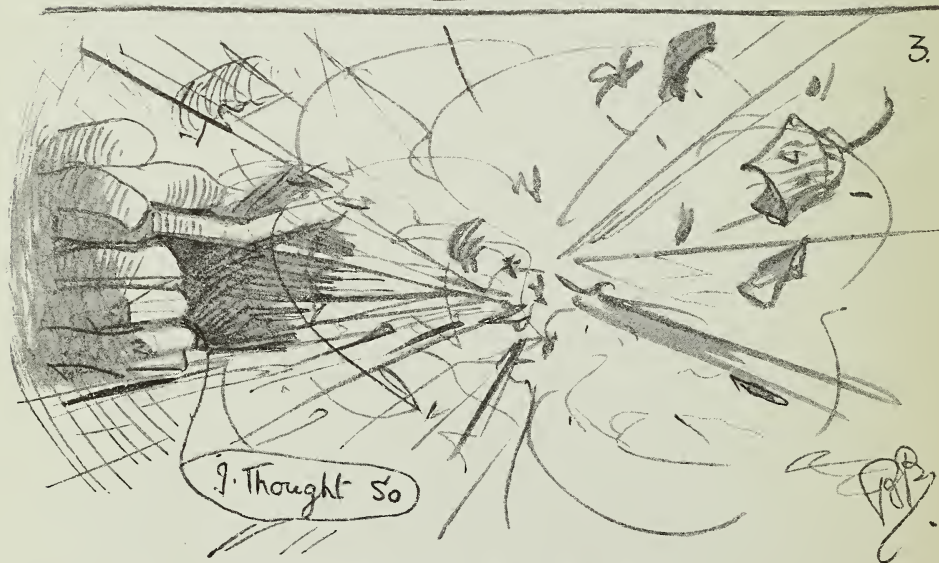
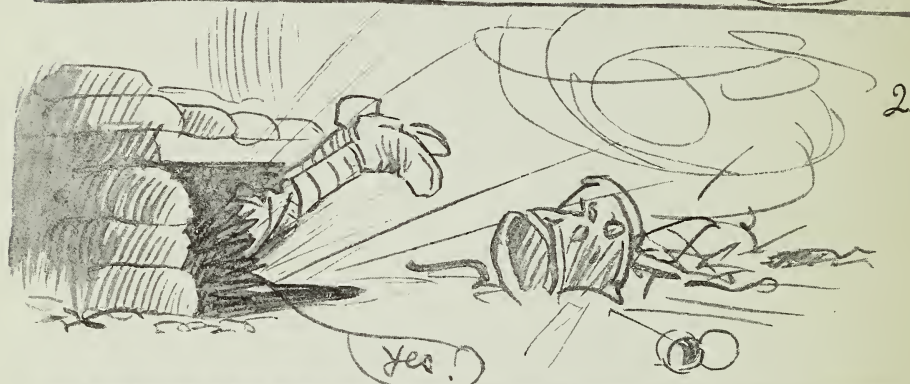
An illustrated paper it had to be, and various processes of reasoning led him to decide on the *Bystander*, which had, as a matter of fact, announced its eagerness to receive humorous sketches from artists on active service.

The sketch was immediately accepted, and was reproduced in the *Bystander* of March 31st. On the ninth of April off went another.

‘I herewith enclose you another black-and-white sketch entitled “They’ve evidently seen me,”’ wrote Bairnsfather. ‘I hope it will meet with your approval. Although I do not observe from a chimney myself, yet at the present time I happen to “live” in a house. By “live” I mean waiting for the next shell to come through the roof.’

This letter revealed to the editor of the *Bystander* what he had hardly dared to hope, i.e., that not only was his new and sudden ‘discovery,’ if the word may be used without patronage, a humorist in line but also in word. Consequently a series of other transactions followed in which Bairnsfather fired each time, and did not once miss the bull. The uniform acceptability of his work became a joyous monotony in the editorial office. What was something of a revelation, however, was the instant appreciation that greeted his early sketches from the military itself. A storm of enthusiasm too rare, alas! in readers of illustrated papers, broke over the offices of the *Bystander* as a result of the first of the Bairnsfather ‘Fragments.’

The Herald of the Dawn



THE HERALD OF THE DAWN.
A 'Fragment' in the Making.

‘Every one here is talking about the pictures. . . . I think they are perfect. By far away the best and most lifelike caricatures we have seen of the war,’ wrote one subaltern. ‘You have livened many a dull hour in the trenches,’ wrote another. ‘The best products of the war’; ‘True to life as a dot. All details correct’; ‘The true story of things as they exist’; ‘We simply howled’; ‘All Bairnsfather’s pictures are on the walls in our messroom’; ‘Absolutely IT,’ and so on and so forth, ran the letters that poured into the offices from Somewhere in France, together with applications to have first refusal of the originals when offered for sale.

In due course, with the usual suddenness of casualties, the feared-for thing happened to Bruce Bairnsfather—the wound described in the last chapter, which announced itself to the *Bystander* in a letter headed ‘King’s College Hospital, Denmark Hill.’

‘I was very sorry not to have been able to write and acknowledge your letter, but unfortunately we got rather busy about then, and now, as a result of the recent occurrences at Ypres, I am docked for repairs,’ was the beginning of this letter, May 3rd, 1915, upon reading which, the editor of the *Bystander* ordered a member of his staff to proceed forthwith to Denmark Hill and ask permission to present compliments and kind inquiries; also to notify the wounded officer that, when

well enough, his presence at Tallis House would be welcome. Bairnsfather records that the psychological effect upon him of this—to the editor a mere civility, and nothing else—was remarkable. To be actually *wanted*! That was indeed a novelty of sensation. In Bairnsfather's case, such is his temperament, it had the reverse of the effect it has on some. Instead of self-satisfaction, he felt an intense desire to respond to the call, to justify to the full the confidence shown in him. When he paid his visit to Tallis House, it was with as full a rough sketch-book as ever was seen by the functionaries of that establishment. . . . It must have taken some hours to cover the whole ground of the interview, but at the end of it, Bairnsfather and his editor had established a complete mutual understanding, which was that the former was to 'produce the war,' as experienced by those taking part in it, by weekly instalments. Bairnsfather was given carte-blanche. The sketch-book, and the work already done, had been enough to convince the editor that the 'goods' were there, and that all that was now wanted was their delivery and display. The public would do the rest—and the public did. By the arrival of Christmas, the first stage of the Bairnsfather offensive had reached its objectives, and thence onward there was no 'retirement according to plan,' but only a continued pressure forward from height to height. The Christmas number of the *Bystander*, 1915, contained as its *pièce*

"^fear



A terror hangs above our heads.
I scarcely dare to think
Of that awful doom, that each one dreads
from which the bravest shrink

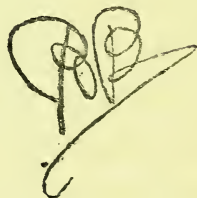
— . . —

It's not the crashing shrapnel shell
Or yet the snipers shot.
It's not the maxims bursts of Hell
These matter not a jot

— . . —

It's a far worse thing than that my son
With which we have to grapple
It's if we see another one——
More tin of PLUM and APPLE.

— . . —



BAIRNSFATHER AS A VERSIFIER.

de résistance the 'Fragment' which is best known to all the world. The 'Fragment' in question was that entitled 'Well, if you knows of a better 'ole, go to it.'

The public saw it and collapsed. It was the limit. A funny picture enough, that of two men engaged in a furious squabble in the midst of a bombardment, but the subject of the quarrel—i.e., whether by any possible chance either of them could be in a worse predicament—seemed somehow to hit the public in its tenderest spot. Why? Well, just this way. Christmas, 1915, marked the lowest level of the Allied fortunes, and angry pessimism was the note of the day. We, the Allied nations, were in an 'ole,' and we knew it, and the question we were all wrangling about, between bombardments, was whether the future was going to show things worse, or possibly better. There was therefore a symbolism about the 'Better 'Ole' picture that raised it altogether above the ordinary 'Fragment' level. Everybody said to everybody else when a dispute arose as to *modus operandi*, 'Well, if you knows,' etc. It got on to the stage. It was made the subject (with acknowledgments) of political cartoons. One of them showed the Married Recruit and Asquith in the 'ole,' another put Kaiser Bill and Kaiser Joseph into it. No cartoon of the war, in actual fact, hit the public so much as that of the two desperate men in the Johnson 'ole, and the only doubt for Bairnsfather in the mind of the readers

It was a perfectly splendid
me. I shall escort it up
to the trenches tomorrow
night, and in the inky, humid,
darkness, will furtively eat-
it. ~~the~~ →



I haven't
time to write
more but

Will do so as soon as I
can

Very Many Thanks

Yours!

Bruce B.

THANKING A FRIEND FOR A CHRISTMAS PRESENT OF A PIE.

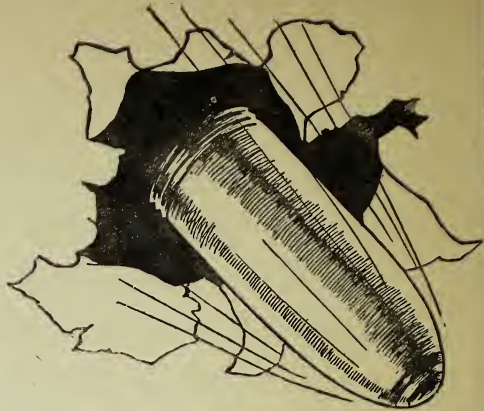
of the *Bystander* was whether he himself would succeed in finding a 'better 'ole' at any future time than this cartoon. People feared that it might be his climax—and people were wrong. By February, he had added to it and its predecessors sufficient cartoons to justify the publishers in issuing *Fragments from France*, which was the first revelation of Bairnsfather's existence to the wider public that does not subscribe to sixpenny illustrated weeklies—the public of the millions. The sale of this slim volume of forty odd sketches exceeded that of any other book of cartoons within the recollection of the book-stall clerk. Edition after edition ran out, and thousand after thousand were reprinted, until the publisher began to be concerned seriously for his supplies of paper. The book found its way into the hands of everybody, from the highest downwards.

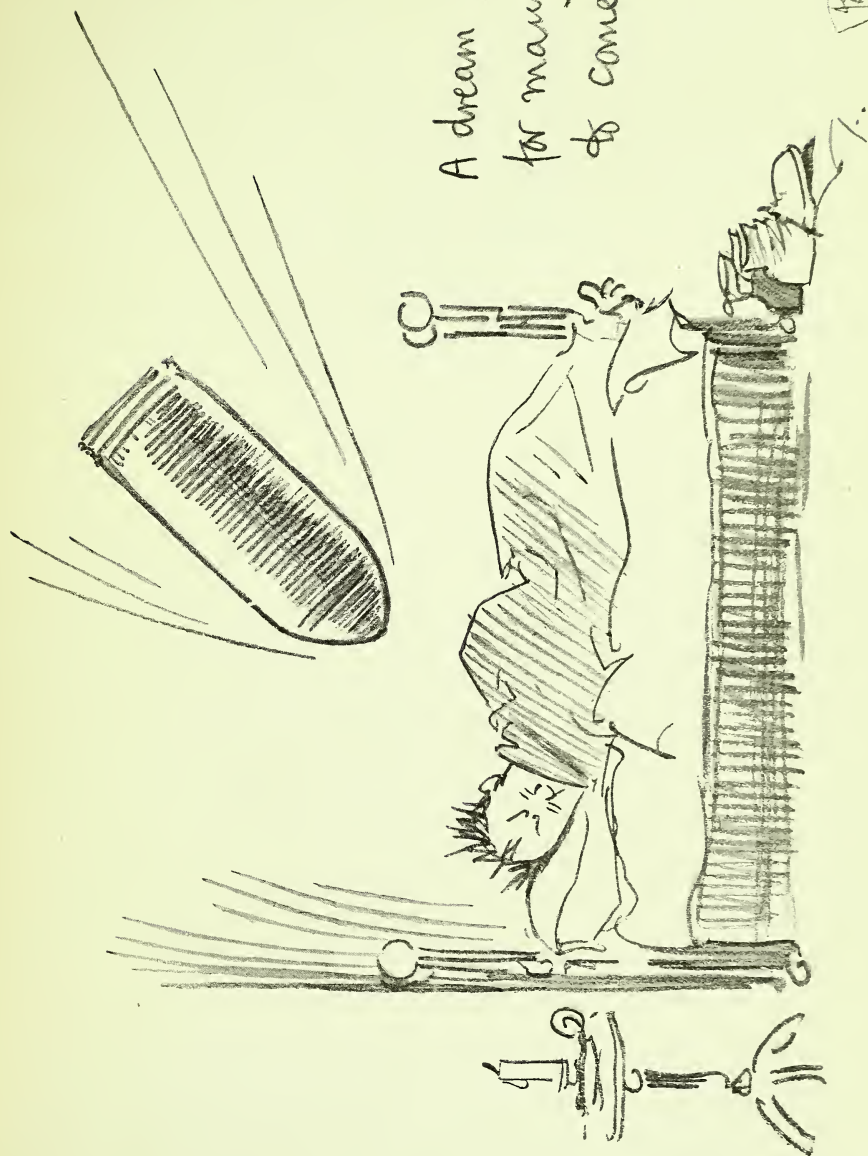
Criticism came, of course. One fine day, there came on official paper, over the signature of an eminent political personage, a reasoned appreciation of the sketches, and an earnest entreaty that Captain Bairnsfather who had 'become a factor in the situation, as was Gilray in the Napoleonic Wars,' should *avoid casting ridicule at the British Army, or giving the impression that it was less serious of purpose than the Armies of the other Allies*. Fear was expressed as to the way the French might regard the Bairnsfather Army, with its incorrigible spirit of levity and its complete lack of proper respect for the dignity of war.

The editor was just meditating on the best form of answer to this when there was announced another eminent gentleman, from the same department, who had called to know whether permission could be granted to a request of *the French Government* to reproduce the 'Fragments' from time to time in the official *Bulletin des Armées!* It was thought that such a request was the best possible answer to any doubts as to the attitude of our Allies towards the humour of Tommy as expressed by Bairnsfather. It occurred that among our own officials there might exist a spirit described by our Allies in the phrase '*plus royaliste que le roi!*'—a tendency to be more concerned for our appearance in foreign eyes than were the foreigners, to be inclined to forget the invocation of the national bard that 'England to herself do rest but true.'

During the months following his wound at Ypres, Bairnsfather was engaged as a machine gun instructor at home. In due course, however, he found his way back again to France, and cheered Tommy up during the whiles of waiting for the great Push by some of his happiest inspirations, which went to complete 'More Fragments from France,' and to form the nucleus of yet a third volume.







A dream of mine
for many years
to come.

W.P.

THE GENESIS OF THE EARLIEST AND BEST KNOWN OF BAIRNSFATHER'S FRAGMENTS.



THE SIXTH FRAGMENT

THE ESSENCE OF 'FRAGMENTS': A REAL CONVERSATION

IT was during his leave, after some months of this, that the writer was successful in getting Bairnsfather to talk at leisure on his way of looking at things. In the short, sharp and decisive interviews it had been possible to get on the subjects of his pictures and publications, it had been difficult to fathom the depths of a subtle nature, or quite to discover exactly what was the true source of his inspiration. His talent is not that of the mere picker-up of unconsidered trifles. Active as his pencil is, and always has been, it is only the means by which accident has designed something should be given to the world. It may seem to be calling that something by a big name if one calls it the Psychology of the Soldier at War, but it is probable that 'Fragments' will be regarded by historical writers of to-morrow as something more than a mere book of funny soldier sketches. Already, the correspondence which has come to him reveals how deep is the note he has struck: and the presence of 'Fragments' on the tables of the leaders of

politics, war and society shows that it is not in the light of mere entertainment that the work is regarded.

One War Office official reported that, on the day after the publication of Volume I, the whole work of his department was stopped. Persons calling to see him on business—one of them was a very important personage indeed—found themselves turning over the pages of ‘Fragments,’ with the result that the object of the call was completely forgotten.

As what follows is an ‘interview,’ the writer must refer to himself in the first person singular.

It was at Bishopton that I succeeded in digging Bairnsfather out of his trench of reticence, and I went prepared. He was just finishing one of the later ‘Fragments.’ It was the one which figures in the third of his books on ‘Fragments’ and which bears the undercut: ‘Where do yer want this put, Sargint?’

The picture depicts a Tommy with a look of extreme perplexity on his face carrying a contrivance known as a tripod, that is the crossed supports of a barbed wire section. On the horizon are the usual ridiculous Huns.

‘Well,’ said Bairnsfather, settling on the settee underneath a huge scarlet sunshade, ‘it doesn’t mean anything in particular. It’s just a pathetic little wisp of humanity who happens to be, like millions of others, engaged in the entirely unfamiliar business of war. He doesn’t want to be there: nor does he want parti-



THE 'OUT SINCE MONS' MAN, WHO HAS INSPIRED SOME OF
BAIRNSFATHER'S MORE SERIOUS SKETCHES.

[To face p. 30]

cularly not to be there. But there he is, and at this particular moment he happens to be responsible for the disposal of a heavy and altogether repulsive thing called a tripod. He doesn't object to it on principle. He knows these things are necessary for the conduct of war. But he does very much indeed want to get rid of that tripod, and to get rid of it is the only thing in life that matters to him at the moment. His whole soul goes out in the question to the sergeant, and everything to him depends on whether the sergeant gives him a definite or an indefinite reply. To him, the disposal of that tripod is of more importance than the whole future of Serbia or Belgium. It is the problem of the war. That's all I can say about it. I don't know that it's particularly funny. But there it is.'

I didn't know myself that it was particularly funny. But when I looked at it again, in view of Bairnsfather's explanation, a laugh surged up from deep in my interior, and lasted quite a long time. I sought further explanations and we turned over 'Fragments' at leisure.

I came to the picture entitled 'I'm sure they'll hear this damned thing squeakin'.' What, I asked, is the actual humour of that situation?

Again, my artist seemed diffident.

'It's much the same as the man with the tripod,' he said. 'That fellow's job at the moment is the drawing of water out

of that pump. He knows water has to be drawn, and that he is responsible for drawing it. But he does think it a cruel world which makes the filling of a mere jar of water—water, mind you, not rum, or anything really worth dying for—such a dangerous proceeding. He is fully prepared to be shot, or gassed, or bombed, or bayoneted in battle. That's what he went out expecting. But he doesn't like the prospect of meeting his end because a "damned pump" squeaks. All pumps in Flanders squeak, and if this "Fragment" had a lot of success, it's because every man in northern France was perfectly sure it was the particular pump he had had experience of himself. I had heaps of letters claiming the pump, and I'm still receiving them.'

'Now,' I continued. 'People say that your Tommy is represented as "fed up." I've heard it said that to depict the British Tommy as fed up is to give a false impression of the spirit of our troops. What about that? For instance—'

We turned to the famous picture entitled 'So Obvious.'

'Who made that 'ole?'

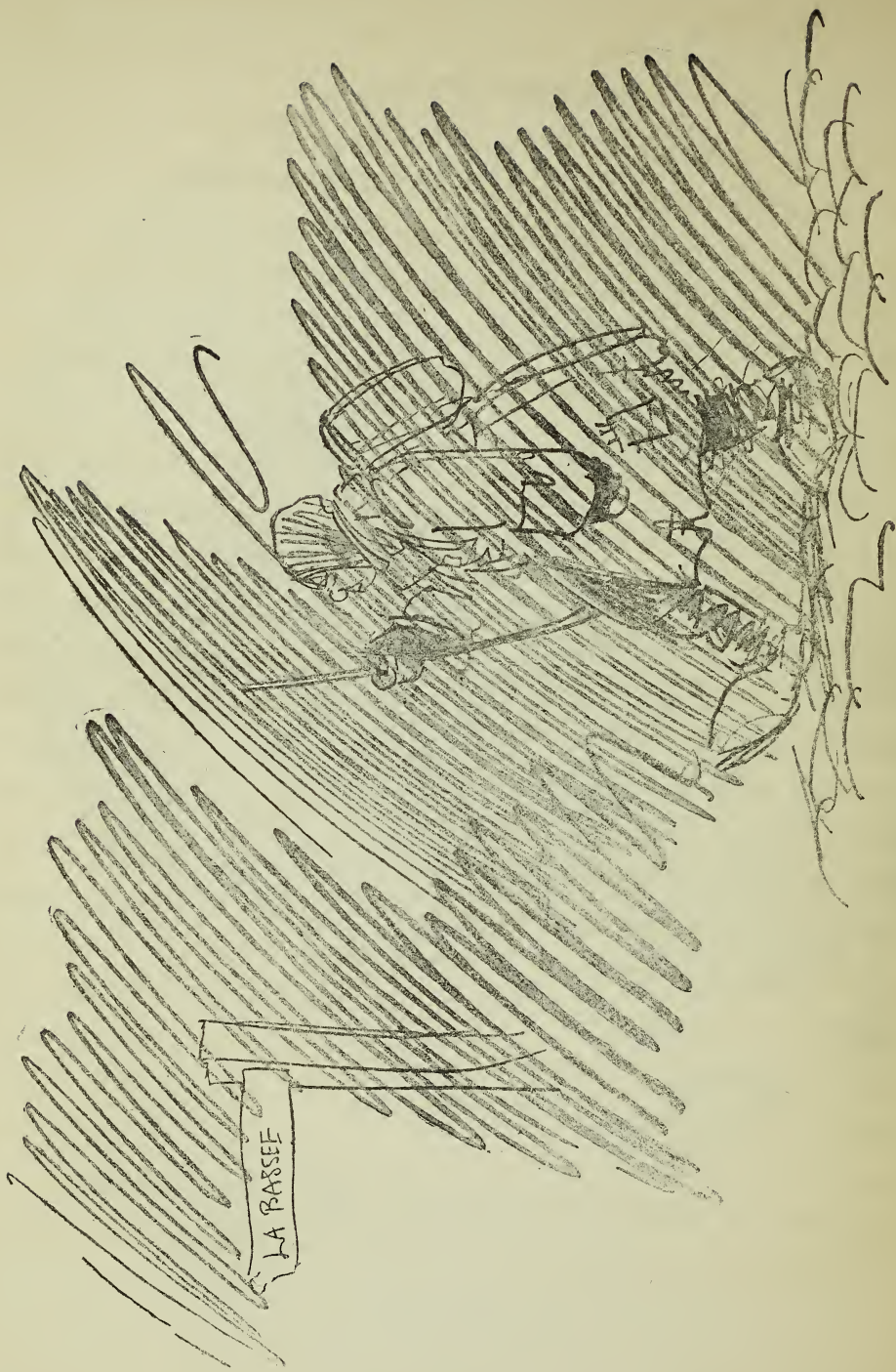
'Mice.'

'Now,' I said, 'the man sitting down is undoubtedly fed up, isn't he?'

'Yes. He's so fed up that when his attention is directed to the hole, which he knows is there, he doesn't even look round. He's been conscious of that hole for days and days. He doesn't



'FED UP.'



TREKKING AT LA BASSEE.

want his attention directed to it at all, and when it is, he gives an answer which he knows to be inadequate and unconvincing. That's that,' concluded Bairnsfather.

We turned next to the 'Fragment' called 'The Thirst for Reprisals.'

'And me a rifle, some one. I'll give these ——s 'ell for this.'

'There,' said Bairnsfather, 'you see just hate concentrated. The figure under the debris feels, for the first time, that full spirit of hate for the enemy, and the full desire to bring about his annihilation, and it isn't because of the sinking of the *Lusitania*, or even the murder of Miss Cavell, or the general outrages of the Prussian military caste. It's just because, at this particular moment, he has been placed in an intolerable situation, and he desires to fix the responsibility on the guilty ones that he can get at, even if it's only with one hand. The war has just been brought home to him for the first time. If the British public had the war brought home to them in the same way, they'd feel the same thing, and the trouble is that they haven't, except where the Zepps fly, and in consequence, they don't feel the war. They might either end it to-morrow or let it go on for years and years. But whichever they did, it wouldn't be as a result of actual experience.

'The Tommies I depict as fed up are fed up with war not

because it is war, but because of the ways in which it expresses itself in regard to the individual. War is a business in which you have too much of everything. When you walk, you have to walk too far: when you rest, you have to rest too long: when you have leave, it's too short, and when nasty things happen, they always happen at the wrong moment, as for instance when you're washing, or changing your socks, or boiling a kettle. It's that sort of thing that causes my Tommy to be fed up, not the state of war itself, which Tommy accepts without repining. He quarrels not with the show itself, only with the way the show is conducted. The spirit of the thing is expressed by the Tommy on the transport who is saying "I wish they'd 'old this war in England, don't you?" It's the idea that this war is something that's being "held," and what's wrong with it in the case of the victim of sea-sickness, is that it's being "held" in the wrong place.'

These few 'explanations' don't perhaps make the jokes any the funnier: what they do explain is Bairnsfather's own mental attitude—his philosophy, if you may call it so. He regards the war as it affects the individual, and in no one of his cartoons does he offer one word of criticism of the war in itself—no, not even where the Hun himself is concerned.

Bairnsfather is as good a Hun hater as anybody when at the front, and I find his views on the ethics of the war, when he



Dance
Santana

ON LEAVE.
'By Gad, it's worth it!'

[To face p. 87

expresses them, to be as orthodox as those of any man living. But he doesn't hate with his pencil as Raemakers hates. He has no propaganda. The sketches where Huns figure show the Hun just to be a human being—as nearly as possible. One of the pictures that made me laugh as much as any other is that which shows Fritz exclaiming 'Gott strafe this barbed wire.' Here we see the family resemblance to Tommy. Fritz doesn't strafe England: merely the barbed wire which happens for the moment to be causing him annoyance. For, as 'Germanski officer' writes, from somewhere in Siberia (*see* page 93):

'Situations of the kind so truthfully depicted by Captain Bairnsfather are not exclusive prerogatives of the British. No more is the standard unpleasantness of such situations—humour—an Allied monopoly.'

Another Hun picture is 'The Tactless Teuton'—a member of the Gravediggers' Corps joking with a private in the Orphans' Battalion prior to a frontal attack.

It is happy not only in its portrayal, but also in the subtle way in which, when Bairnsfather has a joke that is slightly brutal, he fathers it upon the enemy. It is the same when the joke depicts intoxication. Bairnsfather cautiously, and with an eye on the Censor, illustrates the 'Maxim Maxim' that 'machine guns form a valuable support for infantry' by showing the intoxicated person to be an enemy. So safe! Other-

wise, on the whole, he leaves the enemy alone—in his pictures. He professes rather to despise mere pen-and-ink abuse of a person who is being dealt with by more drastic means, and who, in any case, isn't handy to retaliate in kind.

Among Bairnsfather's sketches are, of course, those which are mere plain pictorial jokes, which don't bear any special analysis, or depict any particular state of mind. We get chaff pure and simple, of the kind which prompts the query, 'Well, Alfred, 'ow are the cakes?' in which Bairnsfather shows himself to have a pretty way of combining a funny picture with a funny 'tag.' We have the delightful drawing 'What time do they feed the sea-lions, Alf?' the origin of which is doubtless fact, for he takes it on himself on some occasions to depict the contrast between the real and the romantic. Possibly his home surroundings have had something to do with this habit of thought, for wandering around Warwick and Kenilworth, in and out of Stratford, with the spirit of the Bard ever present, the mind acquires the habit of transporting itself back over the years, and one finds oneself often contrasting the most mundane things as they are with the things as they probably were. Bairnsfather contrasts the romance with the reality of war in two pictures, 'Other Times, Other Manners,' in which we see Sir Plantagenet Smythe at the battle of Vin Ordinaire, exclaiming 'On, on, ye noble English' on the one side, and his descendant Lieut. P.

I've had many close
Shares
in
the
Company



EXTRACT FROM A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

de Smythe at the taking of Dead-pig Farm exclaiming, as he crouches, revolver in hand, 'Come on, you chaps. We'll show these —s what side their — bread's buttered on.' The other shows 'That Sword' as the young officer thought he was going to use it, and how he does use it—as a toasting-fork. I rather fancy that picture, which was one of the early ones, 'did its bit' by revealing to those at home how little of romance and gallantry there is to compensate the boys of the best families for the dangers they run, the effect of which must be to make our admiration for them all the greater.

Little glimpses into the future form a feature of the scheme, as for instance the two venerable greybeards in the trenches remarking 'I see the War Babies' battalion is coming out,' and the picture showing Gen. Sir Ian Jelloid at home, who has found the interior of a howitzer an excellent substitute for his country seat Shrapnel Park, being infinitely cheaper and not a bit draughty if you keep the breech closed. A kindred country-house touch is given in the sketch where Colonel Chutney, V.C., home on short leave, decides to keep in touch with dug-out life by taking his night's rest in a cucumber frame.

Trifles, these, perhaps, but the world of black-and-white art humour has reason to welcome the country-house touch as a relief from the eternal towniness of the past. Whatever may be Bairnsfather's love of the crowd, he is equally a lover of

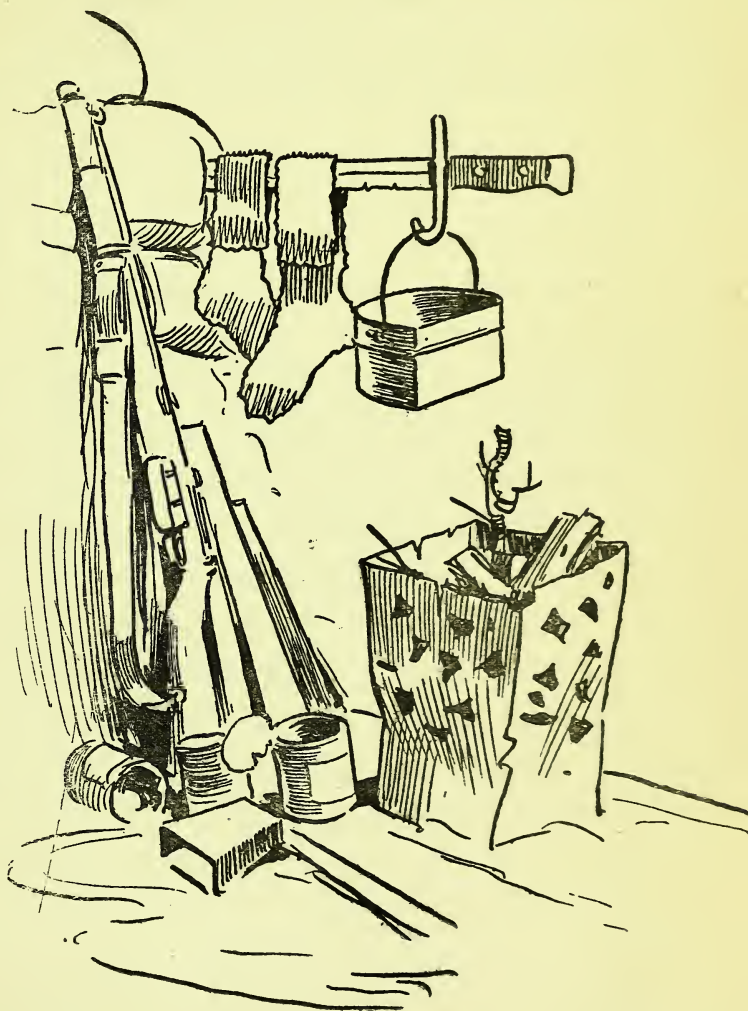


A Merry Xmas.

Yrs Sincerely
Bruce Bannister
Dec 1914

A CHRISTMAS CARD, 1914.

solitude and stagnancy. Open meadows and still streams and tall upright trees and silence have an immense fascination for him. His early efforts at sketching—some examples are on the walls at Bishopton—were of lanes and fields around his home: he has also a love of ruins. It was an irony that his penchant should be gratified in such terrible scenes as Flanders. Yet in the double-page drawing 'We are at present staying at a farm,' one sees the invincible humour at work on a scene after Bairnsfather's own heart. Only one with a keen eye for country life could have noticed those pathetic evidences of rustic peace. I suggest that no town-bred humorist would have thought of that deceased donkey.



Another grim satire on country life in war-time is in that grimly humorous picture which shows 'Directing the way at the Front.' 'Yer knows the dead 'orse 'cross the road. Well, keep straight on till yer comes to a perambulator 'longside a Johnson 'ole.'

Of compliments Bruce Bairnsfather is fond, as is every true artist of comedy whose function it is to deserve compliments. It rejoices his heart to see his shafts go home. He confessed to me, however, that there are tributes he values more than others, and among these is that which came straight from the heart of the trenches to the *Edinburgh Evening News*—

'To us out here, Fragments are the quintessence of life. We sit moping over a smoky charcoal fire in a dug-out, cursing the luck that has brought us here. Suddenly some one more wide-awake than others remembers the "Fragments." Out it comes, and we laugh uproariously over each picture, for are not these the very things we are witnessing every day—incidents full of tragic humour?.'

Another valued tribute was that of the well-known writer who signs himself 'Ensign,' and writes in the *Outlook*: 'You may have possibly seen Captain Bruce Bairnsfather's two inimitable pictures depicting the hour before going into trenches and the hour after coming out. Well, they are absolutely "It." Lord, how we laughed over them in the front line: and mind

you I am not puffing Bairnsfather : he does not need it . . . but take it from me he is one of the people who by supplying roars of laughter and joy to the troops are helping to win the war.'

Lastly, one must not omit that remarkable tribute from 'the enemy' himself, to which allusion was made earlier. It reached the *Bystander* office in June, and read as follows—

'SOMEWHERE' IN SIBERIA,

May, 1916.

[To the Editor of the BYSTANDER.]

DEAR SIR,—

You will no doubt be gratified to hear that a copy of your publication, *Fragments from France*, by Captain Bairnsfather, has penetrated to the very heart of the Asiatic Continent and, chancing upon a colony of officers in somewhat doleful circumstances, occasioned a most welcome spell of hilarity there.

It is to be feared, however, that your gratification will undergo a violent shock on the disclosure that the officers in question are German prisoners—members of that ill-favoured people which, according to the established notion among Englishmen, is totally void of humour and, to use the term of your 'Foreword,' went into the war scowling.

Reluctant as I am to return good with evil, I cannot spare

you the disappointing intelligence that certain fears expressed in the 'Foreword' already mentioned have proved groundless. Far from being 'infuriated' on turning the pages of *Fragments from France*, the enemy so far forgot his true nature as to enjoy a very hearty laugh.

Situations of the kind so truthfully pictured by Captain Bairnsfather are not exclusive prerogatives of the British. No more is the standard remedy against the spiritual unpleasantnesses of such situations—humour—an 'Allies' monopoly. Publications of the 'Fragments' type are as popular with us as with you, and go like hot cakes when to be had. But it's hard to beat Captain B.'s rendering of the subject.

The experience of the Baron of Grogzwig, who, by a timely laugh banished the genius of despair and suicide, may be likened unto the more recent example (illustrated on page 16 of 'Fragments'), in which Private Jones (late Zogitoff, comedy wire artist) demonstrates humour as a reducer of hate. I am of the opinion that the whole book tends towards an effect similar to that produced by the admirable Mr. Jones's stunts.

This avowal on the part of 'an arch enemy' is, I fear, calculated to compromise you horribly if ever known to the persecutors of your cartoon, 'Reported Missing' (who, by the way, are very likely disguised Teutons; or how would you

account for their suspicious lack of humour?). Let me, therefore, out of gratitude for enjoyment bestowed upon us (even though that bestowal was unintentional), entreat you to abstain from carelessly committing this dangerous document to the paper-basket. I should recommend either to destroy it secretly at the dead of night, or—after sprinkling well with holy water—to secret it in the confines of your most innocent-looking, therefore safest, strong box.

I very much regret the present impossibility of enclosing the conventional card, and remain,

Yours truly,

GERMANSKI OFFICER

(temporarily sidetracked).

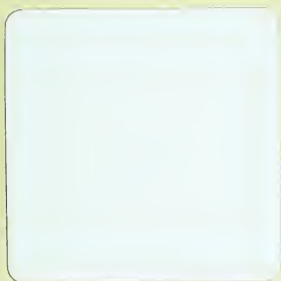
P.S. 1.—With regard to the subject of ‘hate,’ will you permit me to point out that this invigorating quality is less appertaining to the fighting soldier than to the inspired civilian (uniformed and otherwise), who is freshly charged with it every morning at breakfast from the columns of his daily paper. (We read English papers here occasionally, and tremble in our shoes !)

P.S. 2.—Compliments to Captain Bairnsfather, and we should like him to know that we are *so* pleased to provide a source of innocent amusement in the shrinking tendency of our forage caps and the generous dimensions of our waist

measurement. Alas, that there should exist degenerate exceptions ! My own personal 'outer man' lacks both these endearing characteristics. I feel quite an impostor !

Captain B. has an observing eye for the *coiffures en vogue* among the belligerents. It remains a matter of taste whether to back the scalp of bristles or the head of hair like a wheatfield after the tornado (as patronized by your Tommies !). Let us meet half ways and call it a choice of evils !

Bruce Bairnsfather, in conclusion, is no exponent of the gospel of hate—no true soldier is. His hatred is for the enemy in the field, but not for his fellow man. This being the case, he values this testimony from the enemy that his humour is a 'reducer of hate.' In the distant days to come, when the world is at peace, perhaps 'Fragments' may penetrate the heart of the enemy country and do just a little to sow on the stony soil of Teutonism the seed of that humour which, had they but possessed it before, would have restrained the Germans from so terribly un-humorous an act as to plunge the whole world into war with themselves on the wrong side.



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